

asked him if he remembered my promise. Kelly said, 'Jesus Christ! That's right!' And so we danced," said Johnson, laughing.

Years later, Kelly returned Johnson's favor — the dancing continued and so did the friendship. Johnson made other friends in Italy — the four-legged kind — the barking kind.

Johnson's outfit, as he often refers to his unit, picked up a dog while in Italy. "Fleke went everywhere we went. He wasn't afraid of anything," said Johnson.

"In those days, just before the Po Valley, things were serious. Friends were serious," said Johnson. "They woke me up to tell me I was a sergeant just before the Po Valley. We lost some good guys there."

Johnson made it through the Po Valley and started his journey home in 1945, bringing the dog Fleke with him.

"I had all the papers done up on Fleke to get him back with me. It was a comical time. I flew from Pisa to Port Liodi in North Africa on B-17 Bomber.

*"That's the thing about a tank outfit, you get close because everyone is vulnerable."*

Robert M. Johnson

I then took a DC6 down to Dakar and then to Natel, Brazil during what was known as Green Project. I had Fleke in a little bag all the way until I had to show him and his papers to a major who said

to me, 'No animals get past me unauthorized,' " explained Johnson. "Fleke and I made it to Miami, where I had to show Fleke and his papers to customs. The funny thing about it is that the customs guy showed me a whole room of unauthorized animals that had made it past the major in Brazil."

"I was discharged on VJ Day. When I got home bells were ringing and whistles were blowing," said Johnson. "I thought, 'Man, they are glad to see me.' "

Considering everything Johnson went through he has not soured. He still has his sense of humor and his love of God.

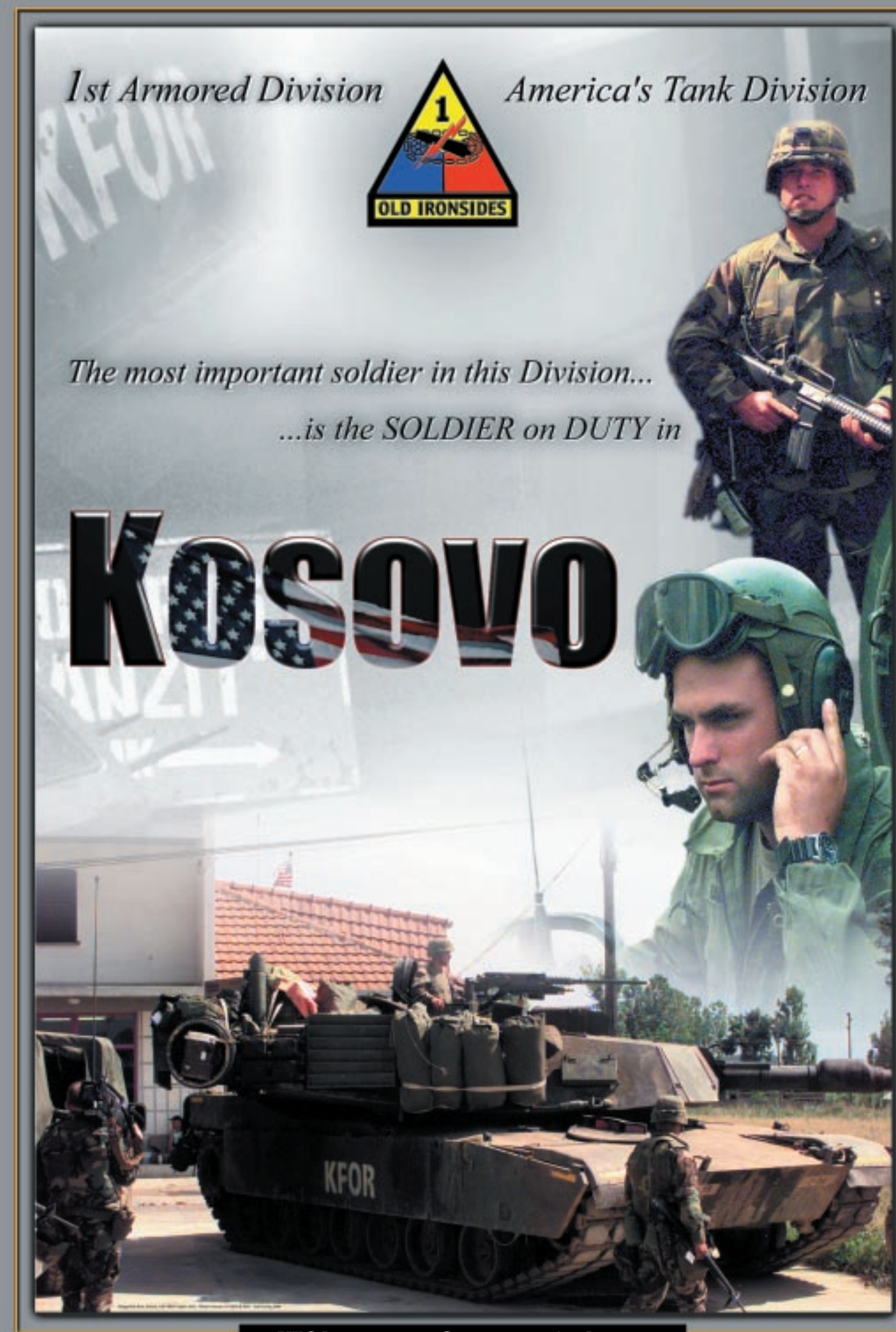
"I walked straight to church with Fleke. We went inside and sat down. I thanked the good Lord I had made it," finished Johnson with tears in his eyes and a crack in his voice.



Robert M. Johnson attends the 1st Armored Division Association Reunion Aug. 2000.



Left to right: (Unknown first name) Rodriguez, Robert M. Johnson, Jack Franks, Charlie Stewart — members of the 4th Tank Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, display a captured Nazi flag.



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